

"We Win the War In Christ"

Text: Luke 11: 14-28

3/4/2018

There's a saying that speaks to a very simple truth: If you want peace, prepare for war. Strictly speaking, that saying is meant to apply to world peace and a country's security against war with its enemies - i.e., if you don't want to have to worry about other nations pushing you around on the global stage, then you need to be a nation with a strong military, one that no other country wants to go to war with. This also applies to individual life - if you want to NOT have to worry about being bullied, then it helps if you can take care of yourself in a fight; if you don't want to be pushed around, then you need to be someone other people don't want to mess with. Again, if you want peace, prepare for war. It's common sense, really.

We Christians have peace, because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus went to war for us with Satan and sin, and He won. In Christ, the victory is ours. In Christ, we win the war. Let's look at that now together ...

As we do, we return to today's Gospel, where we hear again that:

"(Jesus) was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the man spoke, and the people marveled."(Luke 11: 14)

In today's Gospel, Jesus, as He often did in His ministry, exercised authority over the demonic, even casting a demon out of a man who had been prevented (by the demon) from speaking. Jesus restored speech to the man by casting the demon out of him, and incredibly, He encountered opposition to that, as Luke writes that:

" ... some of them said: 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons ... '"(v.15)

The name "Beelzebul" can actually be traced back to the false god Baal, whose worship the Israelites were confronted with (and tempted by) when they took possession of the land of Canaan centuries before. Since the false gods of the land of Canaan were seen to be in league with the devil, over time they came to represent the demonic, and so the name "Beelzebul" is here used to refer to the source of all evil, the demon of all demons: Satan.

From what Luke tells us, the people in today's Gospel accused Jesus of being in league with Satan, and Jesus showed the fallacy of their thinking when He responded:

"Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?"(vs. 17-18a)

Jesus' question was a good one. For how could Satan's kingdom stand if he was divided against himself? He certainly would be divided against himself if, in being in league with Jesus, he allowed Jesus to overthrow his reign by performing exorcisms. That would be tantamount to the devil casting out the devil! As Jesus points out, it wouldn't make sense for him to do that.

But it would make sense if Jesus was doing battle with the devil, and overcoming him. And that's exactly what happened in today's Gospel, as Jesus went on to say:

" ... if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you."(v.20)

Note there that Jesus used the phrase "finger of God" to describe His work of casting out demons. As He did that, He made reference to something we heard earlier in today's O.T. Lesson, where Moses and Aaron were said to be using the "finger of God" to work plagues over the land of Egypt (in the days of the exodus). Those plagues freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, releasing them from life there under the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Talk about a bully - the Pharaoh of Egypt had used his strength to force the Israelites to be his slaves for over 400 years! And yet Israel's God was stronger than the bully, using Moses and Aaron to merely lift a finger to overthrow Egypt and her Pharaoh.

In referring to that event with His "finger of God" statement, Jesus was saying that the strong God of Israel was at work in Him, using Him to overthrow the devil with His miracles of healing. With His miracles Jesus stood up for the people of God of His day; He ended the bullying of Satan through the miracles of healing that He did. Jesus merely lifted His finger to free people from Satan's reign, giving them a new life under the reign of God. The people of God of Jesus' day were at war with the devil, and in Christ, they won the war!

That's true still today: we are still at war with the devil, and in Christ, we win the war! Folks, Jesus still works miracles to free us from the devil's reign for life under the reign of God. Oh I know, sometimes we may doubt if that's really the case. I mean, look around at the world - we don't see much evidence of God's reign, while Satan's reign we see everywhere. Whether it's politics, the business world, sports & entertainment, or walking down the hallways at school, bullying is rampant - the strong seek to dominate the weak every chance they get, and they often succeed. There's not much evidence of God's reign in that; not much evidence of His strength. There seems to be only evidence of the strength of Satan.

But Jesus is stronger than Satan. As He goes on to say in today's Gospel: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil."(vs. 21-22) That speaks to what Jesus came to do: He came to overcome evil by releasing the world from the reign of Satan, restoring it to life under the reign of God. True, sometimes it does NOT look like our Lord is doing that. I mean, when was the last time you saw an exorcism, or a miraculous healing like enabling a mute man to speak? But still, Jesus does act in very strong ways - ways hidden and cruciform perhaps, but ways that are still strong - to free us from the devil's reign.

Jesus acted throughout His life and ministry, freeing people from the devil's reign with His many miracles. He acted ultimately in His death on the cross, where it was He submitted HIMSELF to the devil's reign of death, to free us from it. Risen from the dead He's alive and well to continue acting today, joining us to His Body & Blood in Holy Communion - fitting us there even in our flesh for life under God's reign; and in Holy Baptism- putting His Name on us to identify us as His own and take up residence within us. Jesus goes on to talk in today's Gospel about what happens to a person after an evil spirit has departed from them, saying:

" ... it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says: 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."(vs. 24- 26)

The implication of the spirit finding its house "swept and put in order" is that the house is also empty, as Matthew makes clear in his parallel account:

" .. it finds (the house) unoccupied, swept, and put in order."(12:44)

Because of our Baptism, our house is NOT empty but occupied by the Spirit of Jesus. Our "last state" is never worse than " the first" because, by His Spirit, Jesus is always there to defend us. Or to put it in terms of our theme for today: In the war of good vs evil, right vs wrong, God vs the devil, Jesus is the Victor! In Him, we win the war.

And that brings us back to where we began, with our mention that, if you want peace, you better prepare for war. In our war against sin and Satan, we are prepared, for we have Someone to defend us from the devil's bullying: Jesus Christ. By believing His Word & Sacraments we are defended by God Himself, Who frees us from the devil's reign with the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Though we don't see much evidence of it now, still there is coming a Day when we will see evidence of it, the Day when our Lord gloriously returns to fully restore this world to the goodness of God's reign, the Day when we see our strong One face-to-face. Until then, we continue to cling to the Word of God's Son: our Lord Jesus Christ, trusting that, in Him, we win the war

- in Jesus' ✝ Name,

Amen!